

**James Madison to Joseph Jones, October, 1780.
Transcription: The Writings of James Madison,
ed. Gaillard Hunt. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons,
1900-1910.**

TO JOSEPH JONES.2

2 From the Madison papers (1840).

Philadelphia, October, 1780.

Dear Sir, —I wish it was in my power to enable you to satisfy the uneasiness of people with respect to the disappointment in foreign succours. I am sensible of the advantage which our secret enemies take of it. I am persuaded also that those who ought to be acquainted with the cause are sensible of it; and as they give no intimations on the subject, it is to be inferred that they are unable to give any that would prevent the mischief. It is so delicate a subject, that, with so little probability of succeeding, it would perhaps be hardly prudent to suggest it. As soon as any solution comes out you shall be furnished with it.

We continue to receive periodical alarms from the commissary's and quarter-master's departments. The season is now arrived when provision ought to be made for a season that will not admit of transportation, and when the monthly supplies must be subject to infinite disappointments, even if the States were to do their duty. But instead of magazines being laid in, our army is living from hand to mouth, with a prospect of being soon in a condition still worse. How a total dissolution of it can be prevented in the course of the winter is, for any resources now in prospect, utterly inexplicable, unless the States

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unanimously make a vigorous and speedy effort to form magazines for the purpose. But unless the States take other methods to procure their specific supplies than have prevailed in most of them, the utmost efforts

to comply with the requisitions of Congress can be only a temporary relief. This expedient, as I take it, was meant to prevent the emission of money. Our own experience, as well as the example of other countries, made it evident that we could not by taxes draw back to the treasury the emissions as fast as they were necessarily drawn out. We could not follow the example of other countries by borrowing, neither our own citizens nor foreigners being willing to lend as far as our wants extended. To continue to emit *ad infinitum*, was thought more dangerous than an absolute occlusion of the press. Under these circumstances, the expedient of specific requisitions was adopted for supplying the necessities of the war. But it is clear the success of this expedient depends on the mode of carrying it into execution. If, instead of executing it by specific taxes, State emissions or commissary's and quarter-master's certificates, which are a worse species of emissions, are recurred to, what was intended for our relief will only hasten our destruction.

As you are at present a *legislator*,¹ I will take the liberty of hinting to you an idea that has occurred on this subject. I take it for granted that taxation alone is inadequate to our situation. You know as well as I do, how far we ought to rely on loans to supply the defects of it. Specific taxes, as far as they go, are a valuable fund, but from local and other difficulties will never be universally and sufficiently adopted: purchases with State money or certificates will be substituted. In order to prevent this evil, and to ensure the supplies, therefore, I would propose, that they be diffused and proportioned Among the people as accurately as circumstances will admit; that they be *impressed* with vigor and impartiality; and paid for in certificates not transferable, and to be redeemable, at some period subsequent to the war, at specie value, and bearing an intermediate interest. The advantage of such a scheme is this, that it would anticipate during the war the future revenues of peace, as our enemies and all other modern nations do. It would be compelling the people to *lend* the

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1 Jones was a member of the Virginia Legislature as well as of the Continental Congress. public their commodities, as people elsewhere lend their money to purchase commodities. It would be a permanent resource by which the war might be supported as long as the earth should yield its increase. This plan differs from specific taxes in this, that is an equivalent is given for what is received, much less nicety would be requisite in apportioning the supplies among the people, and they would be taken in places where they are most wanted. It differs from the plan of paying for supplies in State emissions or common certificates, in this, that the latter produce all the evils of a redundant medium, whereas the former, not being transferable, cannot have that effect, and moreover do not require the same degree of taxes during the war.